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"I'm beginning to understand a great deal more about how [the tortures at Abu Ghraib] must have come to happen. It all starts when you have no loyalty or compassion for your own men, your own soldiers."

Malevolent Power at Fort Sill

The Army Slays Its Own

By JoAnn Wypijewski

Marfa, Texas.

No IED, no insurgent force, no lurking Talib killed 21-year-old PFC Matthew Scarano sometime between 9 PM Saturday and 4:45 AM Sunday, March 19. He wasn't in Iraq or Afghanistan or even, despite his rank and year-plus of service, in the United States Army, at least as full membership in that force is officially construed. Matthew Scarano died in his bunk, in the barracks of Bravo Battery 95th, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, but he was as surely a casualty of the War on Iraq as any of the 2,318 US soldiers killed in action. In 2005 he had injured his shoulder during basic training, and on March 1 of that year entered the netherworld of Fort Sill's Physical Training and Rehabilitation Program, or PTRP. More than a year later he was still there, no closer to being healed but still subject to the restrictive rules and routine humiliations associated with basic training, still plagued by what he described in an e mail of March 7, 2006, as "chronic, piercing and sometimes debilitating pain". The Army considered PFC Scarano a trainee; he and the 39 other soldiers in PTRP at Fort Sill considered themselves prisoners.

PTRP is where the Army, desperate for bodies in a time of war, puts broken enlistees whom it is committed neither to cure nor to release, nor even to respect as soldiers and human beings. There they are warehoused, in anticipation of the time they manage to recuperate, pass the grueling PT (physical training) test and can be sent to battle; or fail the test, try again, fail again, stumble through the bureaucratic labyrinth until the point they are chaptered out or medically discharged. All were injured in basic training or advanced individual training and so have yet to be granted "permanent party" status in the Army, even those who have been in service for six months or longer, when that status is supposed to be automatic. In military hierarchy this makes them lower life forms, which is how they've been treated at Fort Sill.

Shortly before Scarano's death, the inspector general at Fort Sill had been forced to undertake an internal investigation of the program for assault and abuse of soldiers, inadequate medical attention, command irresponsibility and overall incompetence. To that list (which I should note is unofficial) they may now add negligence and wrongful death. As of March 20, the Army wouldn't comment on its investigation or on what killed Scarano, but in the week prior, his comrades in the PTRP barracks say, Army doctors had doubled the dose of his pain medication, Fentanyl, an analgesic patch 80 times more potent than morphine, whose advertised possible side effects include difficulty breathing, severe weakness and unconsciousness.

On the night of March 18, according to Pvt. Richard Thurman, Scarano appeared quite pale and weak. The soldier, however, had been in the program for so long — longer than anyone else in terms of continuous service — and was often so visibly suffering or so drugged up as to drool and gaze vacantly that his infirmity on this particular night did not cause special alarm. Shortly after lights out, at 9, Pvt. Clayton Howell noticed that Scarano was lying on his bad shoulder and turned him so he would not be in greater pain when he awoke. At that time Scarano was breathing. When lights came on the next morning and everyone else had risen from their bunks, Howell again went to Scarano; by then he was dead.

What happened next typifies the trapped situation of injured soldiers at Fort Sill's PTRP.

Someone handed Pvt. Thurman a cell phone, saying, "Call your mom." He didn't say, Call the medic, or the chaplain, or the sergeant, or anyone on post. Phoning at all meant breaking the rules, as did having a cell phone, contraband for soldiers in PTRP. Thurman crouched in a corner and amid the near-panic of the barracks hurriedly dialed his mom, Pat deVarennes.

DeVarennes, an apprentice dog groomer who lives near Sarasota, Florida, is about the only person the PTRP soldiers can confidently regard as their advocate. In January, concerned for the well-being of her son Richard and the other men, she began posting reports on a web log called onlyvolunteers.blogspot.com. As a result of those reports and her relentless appeals to Fort Sill's Public Affairs Office, inspector general, others in the Army and her Congressman, Connie

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Mack (whose office initially told her there was nothing it could do), the aforementioned investigation was begun in February. By March 5 some changes, notably the removal of a sadistic drill sergeant, the introduction of a Medical Center liaison to monitor the troops' medical needs, the suspension of punishing physical tasks and the restoration of weekend on-post passes, had been instituted. At a briefing with relatives and friends at the start of Family Weekend on March 10, the Fort Sill cadre were all smiles, assuring the soldiers' loved ones that PTRP was a "work in progress" and that each man would get the individualized treatment or therapy he needed.

Now talk of reform and progress sounds empty, the corpse of PFC Scarano is the latest accusation against an Army up to its ears in complaints of abuse, dehumanization, torture and worse. As deVarennes wrote earlier on her blog in "An Open Letter to members of the cadre who can't stop laughing and to those who claim to have no knowledge of any abuse": "I'm beginning to understand a great deal more about how [the tortures at Abu Ghraib] must have come to happen. It all starts when you have no loyalty or compassion for your own men, your own soldiers."

Before reviewing the most egregious abuses recently visited upon injured recruits at Fort Sill, it is necessary to understand the benchmark for normal at PTRP. As deVarennes neatly puts it, "Imagine basic training that never ends." By the old Army standard, the nine weeks of basic training will "break you down to build you up". Lately there have been some changes in that approach, driven by Army psychologists who reckoned that breaking the spirit accomplishes little beyond creating emotional wrecks or sadists. No longer are new recruits regularly addressed as "ladies" or "shitsacks" or subjected to the "shark attack" of drill sergeants screaming top volume into their ears on the bus the moment they arrive. But the regimen of absolute control and arbitrary rules is unchanged, which is why it is time-limited and why even the most hardened soldier will tell you, "Hell, no, I wouldn't want to do it again".

In PTRP, where soldiers have been stuck for months, time seems to have been stopped. The men live in long, narrow barracks that can sleep 42 in bunk beds. They must stand in formation, on crutches, in pain, four times a day in all kinds of weather, sometimes for 20 minutes to an hour, at the drill sergeant's pleasure. They may not smoke, drink, look at porn, go off post, have sex, have soda from a machine or have any food except during set mealtimes. They may not have cell phones or laptops, may use approved electronic devices only at certain hours, and must compete to use the outdoor pay phones in the 35 minutes to an hour that is allowed after dinner. On weekdays, they may not go anywhere on post except with permission and an escort. At times they have been impressed to enjoy "mandatory entertainment" — a Southern rock concert, the Superbowl, Christian concerts.

When first processed into PTRP, they are not given individualized therapy plans, and doctors at the Medical Center are too stretched to have much time for them, so they use a gym and may sit in a windowless closet-like room to apply ice, but until recently had no sustained medical guidance. They must carry canteens for no other reason — because these are disgusting and no one drinks from them — than to advertise their low status. Their dining hall is festooned with nutrition posters that would suit an elementary school. The bathroom in the auditorium they sometimes use is filthy and looks as if it's been decorated by a deranged Martha Stewart, with an Americana wall strip of Teddy bears, apple pies and the flag. Elsewhere, walls are dominated by rugged propaganda posters, battle scenes, life-size blow-ups of soldiers and invocations to "Live the Army Values".

Periodically the PTRP barracks is subject to what its drill sergeants call a health and welfare check, "better known as a shakedown", says Pvt. Thurman. Drill sergeants enter the bay, ordering the men to empty their drawers and lockers. Bedding is stripped, mattresses upended, vent covers unscrewed. During one of these routines, Thurman, who's been in PTRP since November of 2005, was discovered to have a pack of cigarettes and a lighter and was given an Article 15, or nonjudicial punishment, and a fine of $270. Almost everyone who's been in PTRP for any length of time has received an Article 15 for something.

Although the cadre says only "motivated" soldiers are accepted into PTRP, that toys as much with truth as saying everyone in the Army is a volunteer. Soldiers injured in training cannot un-volunteer. They cannot say, "On second thought, I'd rather not ruin my leg" or ankle or back or shoulder, and go home. After he was seven months in the Army, doctors discovered that Pvt. Thurman has flat feet, once an automatic disqualifier, but Pvt. Thurman cannot leave. He actually completed basic training and advanced individual training in November. At the time he had stress fractures in his ankle, and because he couldn't run as required for the final PT test, a post doctor prescribed an alternate walking event. He graduated with ceremony, but that same day the Army changed its mind. An officer pulled him and two others soldiers aside and told them walking wasn't good enough and they were being sent to PTRP; there, to satisfy formal requirements, the three were "ungraduated".

In pro forma questioning Thurman had been asked if he wanted to go to PTRP.

"No", he said.

The inquiring officer wrote on his file, "Soldier is unmotivated", and "Soldier is cleared for administrative action", meaning nonjudicial punishment or court martial.

"Lack of motivation is a punishable offense in the US Army", Thurman says, so the cadre's job is to talk soldiers into motivation. They threatened Thurman with being recycled back to day one of basic training. After eight months in PTRP another soldier, who had completed eight weeks of the nine-week basic course before he was injured, opted to do just that to get out of this supposed rest and rehab program.

"You have an area you can be in. If you leave that area without permission you can go to jail", Thurman explains. "You have

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people over you with unquestioned power, and your daily life is at their will. Everything's a privilege." Using the phone is a privilege. Going to the PX on the weekend is a privilege. And as in prison, privileges can be taken away. The culture breeds tormentors and tattle-tales among the inmates — soldiers who haze their comrades, who report on others for piddling infractions like drinking a Coke from the soda machine for the imagined benefit that might bring the snitch.

"I liken being here to being incarcerated", Scarano wrote to deVarennes less than two weeks before his death. "And it often *helped* during the bleaker points in PTRP history to think of it as such: I'm far from being any kind of expert on the subject, but perhaps it was a psychological self-defense mechanism to try to perceive what was going on as being punitive in nature."

The soldiers have been ordered not to speak of events that are part of the ongoing investigation, so as not to jeopardize it, but enough was put on the public record earlier via deVarennes' blog to indicate that punishment and not therapy or rehab was in fact the program. What follows is drawn from her reports. In January a Drill Sgt. Langford was put in charge of the soldiers at PTRP, and he arrived spitting vinegar, telling the men, as deVarennes recaps, "You're worthless, you're malingerers, you're scared, you're useless, you're not soldiers". Every day, addressing men keenly aware of their failure, he picked at the scab of vulnerability. He cancelled their weekend on-post passes, confining them to the small area around their barracks, and ordered that on weekdays they could not sit on their beds except during the three hours of free time from 6 PM to 9 PM. He assigned them jobs around the post, which while aggravating some of their injuries at least gave the soldiers one place where they are treated as responsible grown-ups.

In January, before the first Family Weekend, the drill sergeant ordered the men to clean and wax the floor of their barracks. After they did it once, moving the heavy bunks and wall lockers in and out of the room, he declared the job inadequate and ordered that they get down on their knees with small scrapers and remove every speck of old wax. Out and in went the furniture again. A soldier with a herniated groin dared not slack off in the moving operation lest he and everyone else incur extra abuse for his offense.

One night another drill sergeant, by the name of Bullock, decided to have some fun with the soldiers and give them a taste of sleep deprivation, ordering them to line up in formation outside every hour from 10 PM to 2 AM. After each line-up they could not simply fall on their bunks fully dressed for the next time because he ordered that they present themselves in different apparel. Soldiers on sleep medication were pulled from their beds by their comrades and hustled into line, since if everyone did not appear at formation, everyone would be punished. At the most recent Family Weekend, Drill Sgt. Bullock was still on premises, still wearing his Smoky the Bear hat, still in apparent good standing.

As she was receiving word of these abuses, deVarennes was trying to get someone to care. Rep. Connie Mack's office told her Richard would have to fill out a form before it could act, and since that was impossible, the door slammed. John McCain's office sent her a form letter saying he'd need something in writing from Richard. John Kerry's office never replied at all, which was the most common response she got from members of Congress.

The drill sergeant kicked the private's legs out from under him, sending him to the floor screaming. A first sergeant on the scene ordered the others to turn away, and just as at Abu Ghraib, told them they didn't see anything.

Then an injured soldier simply lost it. He'd been in PTRP for several months, was declared healed and sent upstairs to the Fitness Training Unit, or FTU, where uninjured soldiers who couldn't pass the PT test go through exercise drills to pass it. But his injury prevented him from doing the required exercises, and in the hopelessness of the situation he cut himself up, smeared himself with excrement and marched out of the barracks naked except for his socks and boots. He was packed off to a mental ward for a few days and put on suicide watch. He is now awaiting a discharge, though after his freak-out the Army gave him one more chance to fail just to assure itself that he wasn't faking.

The soldier's breakdown shook the others in PTRP, and that night Pvt. Thurman called his mother and said, "You've got to find a way to help us." Soon after, a soldier who'd been sitting on watch at the mental ward, whom deVarennes nicknamed Pvt. Gopher, committed his own small act of defiance in front of Drill Sgt. Langford and was ordered to "take a knee", meaning to genuflect. As he'd recently had knee surgery, he told Langford that he wasn't able to do that, whereupon the drill sergeant kicked his legs out from under him, sending him to the floor screaming. A first sergeant on the scene ordered the others to turn away, and just as at Abu Ghraib, told them they didn't see anything. Earlier some of them had tried to report abuses to the medical center, to mental health counselors, to higher-ups. Now they'd been ordered to shut up, meaning any action they might contemplate would be in direct violation of an order.

Pvt. Thurman was not aware of his mother's blog at that point, and after hearing from him she decided caution was the way to catastrophe. "I was no longer afraid", she told me, "because I felt that at the moment that assault occurred, the dice were rolling for all of these guys. I thought, 'The lunatics are running the asylum, so I have to do everything I can do, and if I have to go by God trooping around and getting arrested outside the Fort Sill gates, I will do that.' At that point I felt nobody's kid was going to be any safer for not saying anything — on the contrary."

Apart from her own posts, she spent $300 in ads on other popular websites, and, as she put it, "the hits kept coming".

It is illegal for a drill sergeant to strike a soldier, but Langford was not arrested. It is illegal to cover up a crime, but the first sergeant remains in his position. Langford was removed as a drill sergeant; he "lost his hat", as they say on post. Whether he suffers any further indignity or punishment depends on the outcome of the current investigation.

Yet for all this intervention, PFC Scarano still perished. The inspector general did not know about the death until deVarennes e-mailed him. The base commander didn't know until Monday. On that day, a spokeswoman at Fort Sill's Public Affairs Office

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said she couldn't tell me anything about the soldier's death "because I've never heard of that person". In death as in life, this soldier didn't count for much in the Army.

In his March 7 e mail to deVarennes, thanking her for "becoming our champion when no one else would", he wrote:

"My injury is degenerative and getting worse.

"I was lied to about surgery, as were many others, and it was brought to the attention of the Investigator-General that the medical community had been telling us that we face courts-martial or severe forms of non-judicial punishment if we declined the surgery suggested to us by the doctors here at Fort Sill. This has since been demonstrated as a bald-faced lie.

"I was told that I'd receive arthroscopic shoulder surgery initially, which had little chance of success, and when that failed I would receive a full shoulder replacement, after which my left shoulder would be essentially disabled for the rest of my life.

"Just a little rudimentary research into the subject revealed that there are countless other, infinitely more promising options available to me in the civilian world, which I choose to explore, instead of being a guinea pig to a medical system I have no faith in, whatsoever. This is the same medical system which has botched surgeries and performed procedures without the patient's knowledge. I guess their rationale is that up until recently, the patients, in our case, were under the impression that we had virtually no input in the matter, anyway.

"I've recently been told, by our case worker, that I'm getting an MEB [Medical Evaluation Board hearing] but as of now my consultation is pending. I've heard no further word yet but am hopeful that as a result of the controversy caused by the attention garnered by your blog, I'll be out of here soon. I am a casualty of a broken system; I fell through the cracks of the bureaucracy that is the system which all of us must go through….

"I am a living symbol of the failure of the system and after having been ignored for so long, despite trying to raise as much attention as I could, I *might* finally be able to get on which my adult life after spending over a third of it in PTRP, deprived of everything from being able to be with my family, to fundamental physical needs such as sleep and recuperation from my injury, to the basic human freedoms and creature comforts which I will never again take for granted."

Scarano was working on a more formal document right before he died, trying to understand cognitive dissonance, the psychological process of accommodating when what one knows or believes to be true collides with a contradictory reality.

At Family Weekend in March, Private Howell, who has been in and out of PTRP for fourteen months, gave deVarennes a paper he was working on, compiling the complaints of Bravo Battery and reflecting on his own predicament. Toward the end of it, he wrote:

"For the initial 9 weeks of basic training I can understand the hazing and ruthless treatment, but not for over a year. I used to be able to cope by listening to music, calling people on a hidden cell phone, or talking to my friends in the bay. But now they will no longer let me talk to my friends or listen to music on the radio, and they found the hidden cell phone and confiscated it. If I was just able to do anything to mentally get away from this place I would. Just to forget who I am and what I am doing day in and day out. An hour or two of disassociation is the only way I was able to put up with the meaninglessness and mindless bullshit and torment of being here 'on duty' 16 hours a day. The only way to describe my life is sorrow, loathing, spitefulness, depression, and endless torturous misery. Nobody is willing to help improve our treatment or listen to our complaints.

"I joined the army to make a difference and to help other people. Now I am being held prisoner, doomed to a fate worse than death. At one point I know I had a purpose. At one point I know I cared. I do not know when I lost it and if I will be capable of ever possessing it again….

"I do not think I have shown any of the army values for a very long time. I believe I projected the image that I cared for many months and it was just an act; but it was all that I could do. I am being set up for failure and have been for weeks.

"The fact that this unit will not follow regulations does not inspire hope or willingness to comply with any orders or any of their bogus policies. In my opinion none of the cadre show any of the army values to any of the soldiers here. That is just my opinion and I may not see the whole picture. On exodus [the name for Christmas break] I came back with renewed motivation that I have not had since basic training. Drill sergeant Frazier and Langford managed to snuff out all of my hope and drive within the first few days we were all back.

"I will try to do my best, but I cannot manage a positive thought for very long. The army values did mean something to me at one point even though it is just propaganda on paper. I have always known it was just propaganda, but they are a good base for morals if people would lead by example.

"In conclusion I hope this paper reaches somebody and they read it in whole and are not too judgmental. I also hope I can improve myself and the situation that I am in. Perhaps I can be what they want me to be. Perhaps I can fulfill my enlistment and be productive, but that is not realistic. And it is not what I really want; all I want in this world is to be anywhere but here. I believe that I have permanent physical and psychological damage from this place. If I could describe this place in 2 words it would be 'Malevolentia Imperium.'

"1 Malevolentia: Latin, malevolent; having or exhibiting ill will; wishing harm to others; malicious. Having an evil or harmful influence

"2 Imperium: Latin, can be translated as 'power'. In Antiquity this concept could apply to people, and mean something like 'power status' or 'authority', or could be used with a *geographical* connotation and mean something like 'territory'."

"I am a casualty of a broken system; I fell through the cracks of the bureaucracy that is the system which all of us must go through....I am a living symbol of the failure of the system."

It is estimated that 15 percent to 37 percent of men and 38 percent to 67 percent of women sustain at least one injury due to the rigors of basic training. Although Fort Sill's is believed to be the worst, the Army has PTRP units also at Fort Knox, Fort Jackson, Fort Leonard Wood and Fort Benning. CP

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Is Stalin or Confucius the Guide? Secrets of the Garden of Bliss

By CHRISTOPHER REED

In his book about North Korea, Bradley Martin describes a curious journey there in 1979 when he met "a man called Pak", a council member of the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. They lunched lavishly, but Martin was disappointed over the lack of knowledge Pak — he gives no other name — displayed about the U.S.A., particularly his misapprehension that Americans "eat turkey on our independence day". Poor Pak had mixed up the Fourth of July with Thanksgiving , which of course the world knows is in November and is movable (the last Thursday) but hardly a feast. In my U.S. time I found roast turkey a dreary dish, but knew when it was eaten, thus often managing to avoid it.

So here's Pak, who works at the North Korean council (outside the foreign ministry) dealing with nations that don't extend formal diplomatic recognition to North Korea eliciting Martin's mild ridicule for confusing a rudimentary cultural fact. Two questions for Bradley Martin: On what date is the national day of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and what traditional dish is served on that day? In the book's 868 pages, the product of a quarter century's research, he does not say. In fact he details no dishes of North Korea (an excellent cuisine — when there's food), but does deal lengthily with the crowded sex lives of its late ruler, Kim Il Sung, and his son Kim Jong Il, the present supremo. This pair of adulated dictators provides the title, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (St Martin's Press).

It is not an unworthy book; it gives more details about the Kims' lives than any other, and these two Byzantine figures are the most mysterious of any national rulers anywhere . And as Kim the younger could be, at least in theory, the next man to drop a nuclear bomb on the world, he is worth knowing about.

Yet Martin fails to do an important thing. He forgets he is an American. This might be excusable, but another thumb on the balance he might otherwise bring to measure the Kims is his second handicap . Martin was and still seems to be instinctively a U.S. mainstream former foreign correspondent (*Baltimore Sun, Asian Wall Street Journal, Newsweek*). That is a crippling disadvantage because it burdens him with so many harmful assumptions — the basic goodness of the U.S.A.; its inherent good will and benevolence toward the world, etc.

To be fair, another American has written a long book about the two Koreas. He was not a correspondent and is mostly free of the above priggish assumptions. His name is Bruce Cumings , a professor of history at the University of Chicago, and probably America's foremost authority on Korea as author of the two-volume *Origins of the Korean War* (1981 and 1990) and writer of a book I read together with Martin's tome, *Korea's Place in the Sun, A Modern History* (Norton, 2005). Here, even with only one chapter devoted specifically to the Kims, Cumings immediately tackles in one definitive passage the North Korean enigma and the trouble with its dated dismissal as "Stalinist" by Washington and the mainstream media.

"My position," Cumings writes, "is that North Korea is closer to a Neo-Confucian kingdom than to Stalin's Russia. With its absurdly inflated hero worship and its nauseating repetition, the North Korean political rhetoric seems to know no bounds; to a person accustomed to a liberal political system it is instinctively repellent. But it has been there since the beginning." Exactly. Once we appreciate the continuing legacy of this 5000-year-old kingdom's history — and Cumings devotes many pages to it — the usual adjectives trotted out by official America, and noted too often by Martin as probably definitive, become just that: adjectives.

Of course, these too are essential to the numbing nomenclature of Pyongyang propagandists who ceaselessly churn out lurid praise extolling their Glorious Wise Leader and "the garden of bliss that blooms in his sunlight of boundless love and warm everlasting care." Perhaps the baroque blandishments of People's Korea and the tiresome cliché grinders of capitalist Washington D.C. should have a purple prose contest to describe each other's inglorious bosses. President George W. Bush has been quoted as saying he "loathes and detests" Kim Jung Il — tame stuff surely for the masterful mythmakers of the people's paradise. I eagerly anticipate descriptions of the "wasteland of gloom that multiplies under the menacing shadow of Bush's matchless ignorance and frigid indifference," and so on.

Meanwhile, what to make of the northern half of the Hermit Kingdom in its modern guise, the military stronghold of a cult-like dictator presiding over a subordinated people who only a decade ago were ravaged by horrific nationwide droughts, floods and famine? (And let us not forget that during the Korean war (1950-53) the American turkey-eaters killed and maimed hundreds of thousands of his fellow comrades in mass bombings, if not back into the Stone Age then at least until not one stone was left standing upon another.)

Martin exercises the foreign correspondent's lazy — he would say "balanced" — prerogative of quoting numerous talking heads. One is an Australian diplomat/historian, Adrian Buzo, who has written thus of North Korea: "Only Stalin's system at its height can remotely compare with the authority exercised by Kim Il Sung from 1967 to his death in 1994." The Korean political tradition offers no antecedents for Buzo's "cult of the fatherly leader, reliance on charismatic leadership and cult of personality in politics," not to mention, "militarism, executive activism, and pervasive government intrusion into what was previously the highly self-regulatory realm of clan and family life."

The features of Stalinism Buzo sees were melded in North Korea with "the tastes, prejudices and experiences of the Manchurian guerilla mind-set", in which Kim Il Sung was a genuine hero, fighting commando raids against the imperial Japanese army in Manchuria in the 1930s. This mind-set Buzo describes as "militaristic, Spartan, ruthless, conspiratorial, anti-intel-

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lectual, anti-bureaucratic and insular."

Then there is Hwang Jang Yop, a North Korean student in Stalin's Moscow and the Workers' Party secretary for ideology in Pyongyang before his 1997 defection. Hwang argues that son Kim Jong Il overturned Stalinism with Confucian notions. Whereas "Stalin's orders and instructions were not considered coming from an individual but from the working class," in North Korea they became the reverse. "The Great Leader does not live for the people. It is the people who live for the Great Leader."

That is a nice ideological way of construing it, but what of history? This Martin ignores, but Cumings regards it as a *sine qua non*. He spends chapters describing a strictly stratified society going back thousands of years. In old Korea slaves comprised about one third — yes, over 30 per cdent. Doing business was scorned by an aloof privileged class that preferred studying scholarly interpretations of Confucian edicts on the organization of daily life. Foreigners were scorned and kept out, and, as an all-powerful monarchy, the king's word was absolute. Doesn't that sound like today's DPRK, or do you still prefer likenesses to Uncle Joe Stalin puffing on his people's pipe? When will Washington "experts" realize that "monstrous communism" is an antiquated cliché?

It seems true, as Martin documents, that in today's North Korea families are torn asunder and successive generations made to suffer for one member's misbehavior, such as leaving the country". Both Kims treated attractive young female citizens as their property. The economy is now enfeebled, after outshining South Korea during its 1950-70s military dictatorship period. Martin generously states that Kim Il Sung was a brilliant leader, and that his son now demonstrates interesting tendencies toward reform. Furthermore, the horrors of dictatorship were often moderated, although no people should suffer the privations of this people's paradise.

Yet Kim Jong Il can display disarming charm. Bush junior's childish hatred of the "pygmy," as he once called him, helps nobody except Bush's ultra-right cronies. When former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright met Kim in October 2000, she found a man prepared to make deals. For a promise of non-aggression from Washington, he was prepared to cease selling missiles abroad and developing his own. The U.S.A. would have to pay for economic help but, Albright concluded, "it would be minimal compared to the expense of defending against the threats its missile program posed."

Of course, Pyongyang has been looking down the U.S. nuclear barrel for decades. During the Korean War, the U.S.A. both threatened and prepared nuclear attacks on the North, with bombardments of 30 or more atom bombs seriously discussed at top level. In September and October of 1951, Cumings relates, lone U.S. B-29 bombers of the kind that destroyed Hiroshima flew over North Korea dropping dummy A-bombs in serious practice runs before it was decided, for purely technical reasons, that "timely identification of large masses of enemy troops was extremely rare." The feelings of North Korean officers watching these dummy runs can only be imagined.

Today the U.S.A. has scores of nuclear missiles aimed at the DPRK, yet western "intelligence" does not know for sure — again — whether it really does have the bomb. However, scenarios of warfare, with the Pentagon dropping its own weapons of mass destruction on the "Stalinists", are a favorite in what pass for serious media accounts in America.

"None will sleep well with nukes in the hands of the most belligerent and paranoid regime on earth." Now is that North Korea, or ...

In 1993 this appeared: "An economically-desperate North Korea, its leadership as isolated as ever, rejects every effort the West makes to persuade it to abandon its steadfast pursuit of a nuclear bomb. Instead it issues warnings about the possibility of war, which are promptly echoed by a high ranking U.S. defense department official... North Korea's troops go on combat alert... Last week in Korea, the nightmares all seemed to be coming true." It is difficult ovedrlook the feeling of glee with which this seems to have been written in *Newsweek* , Martin's old mag .

Again in 1993 this account: "The single most dangerous problem [is] the impending nuclearization of North Korea... None will sleep well with nukes in the hands of the most belligerent and paranoid regime on earth [a reference to the DPRK, not the U.S.A.]... controlled by the possibly psychotic Kim Jung Il, the closest thing to Dr. Strangelove the nuclear age has seen." Thus the editorialist Charles Krauthammer in the Washington Post.

The same year as Albright's visit to Pyongyang, the new president of South Korea, Kim Dae Jung, also went to create what he called "sunshine" between the two warring states, which had never signed a peace agreement since the war ended, but only a cease-fire. Again he found Kim Jong Il to be surprisingly agreeable, and millions of South Koreans warmed to his appearance on their television news.

Then came Bush's State of the Union speech in January 2002, when he included People's Korea in his "axis of evil" — astonishingly, almost on a whim in order to alleviate accusations of anti-Islam bias with the other two Muslim members of a trio named in a Nazi echo of World War II military definitions. Bush had started the war of words again, a state in which both sides revel.

Surely, the overblown nonsense declaimed by both sides is what so alarms us in a strategic area posing real risk, once more, of thermo-nuclear obliteration. Instead of demands for "prior non-aggression guarantees" or "the normalcy of serious diplomacy" from Pyongyang and Washington, creditable though these may be, could they not first agree to dump the rhetoric? No more repetitions, please, of idiot panegyrics about the "Beloved Leader and his heavenly visions" or even bombastic bombardments declaring that "imperialist aggressors will be drowned in a sea of fire." The likes of Krauthammer would have to shut up as well.

As the U.S.A. has more hardware and makes the most serious threats, perhaps it should go first by offering to stop repeating Pyongyang's soppiest sallies, like those American journalists' endless repetitions of a celebrity's notorious faux pas (to add "for", as "repetitions for decades?) decades after its first utterance. Give it a rest, guys.

Instead, read these two books, or if only one, the work by Cumings. Recall his phrase about North Korea's having "been there since the beginning." It also, despite countless forecasts of collapse, looks like being there for quite a while yet (didn't he just told so in a previous sentence?). So why not just try taking it seriously? CP

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Three Years On: Where's the Resistance Here On the Home Front?

By Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

Three years into the war in Iraq and now about two out of three Ameri cans are against it, as against about one out of fifty elected politicians. In Iraq, (comma) 2,315 Americans have died and 17,100 wounded; many of them with limbs lost, some facing a lifetime in a wheel chair. Of the tens of thousands who have returned from combat to army bases or civilian life here, around 2.5 per cent are suffering from severe post traumatic stress syndrome, powder kegs, a menace to themselves and their families. There will be psychic as well as physical wreckage across America for years to come.

In Iraq, the Johns Hopkins study last September made an accounting of the full death toll wrought by the devastation of the U.S. invasion and occupation. It concluded that "about 100,000 excess deaths" (in fact 98,000) among men, women, and children had occurred less than eighteen months. Violent deaths alone had soared twenty-fold. But, as in most wars, the bulk of the carnage was due to the indirect effects of the invasion, notably the breakdown of the Iraqi health system.

Re-working the Johns Hopkins study with the benefit of better techniques of statistical analysis, Andrew Cockburn concluded here in CounterPunch. early in the New Year that on the basis of the raw sample data compiled by Iraqis for the Johns Hopkins study, the true number of dead in Iraq in consequence of the war had probably hit around 180,000, with a possibility that it had already reached as high as half a million. Of course all sets of numbers, whatever statistical analysis you accept, have been climbing steadily ever since. The press here still ludicrously cites Bush's lowball figure of 30,000, which he gave in December 2005, even though an Iraqi minister said 50 Iraqis a day are being killed.

Iraq itself is a disaster, teetering on the brink of full blown-civil war. Conditions in life in the capital and other major cities have grown steadily worse across three years. As a functioning state Iraq has collapsed, the ministers in its government hastening overseas as often as they can or, when home, looting public assets while never daring to venture out of the green zone.

Mention of the "green zone", a bubble of corruption and delusion, takes us from Baghdad to Washington and its green zone, secluded from reality, in which the Democrats now dwell.

As a political matter one would have thought that few leaders in recorded history would be more vulnerable to attack than Bush and Cheney, regarding their war in Iraq. The pretexts have been discredited; the purported aims have long since evaporated, as the present U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, concedes wanly: "We seem to have opened a Pandora's Box. Bush sags to the lowest presidential approval ratings in the last century.

Across the past year the peace movement didn't do much, so far as we could tell. There are thousands of excellent local efforts, but no national agenda, no overall strategy for ending the war. As popular opposition to the war across the country has mounted, the demonstrations have got smaller! We ascribe this in large part to the disastrous fealty of the leadership of at least two of the big organizations to the Democratic National Committee. This explains why UPFJ, for example, was missing in action for most of 2004. The national leaderships of the peace movement have failed but were bailed out by two great champions who changed the political picture. The first was Cindy Sheehan, who haunted the man whom, Hugo Chavez taunts as "the king of vacations" for those crucial weeks in the late summer of 2005, outside his ranch in Texas. (Has any president ever had a worse stretch than Bush did between the founding of Sheehan's Camp Casey, through hurricane Katrina, to the exposure of the domestic spying program, with Cheney shooting one of their top funders as lagniappe?)

The second champion was Jack Murtha, the 73-year-old former U.S. Marine and life-long hawk who turned on the war in a sensational press conference on the Hill in November, calling for "immediate withdrawal" and repeating that call in vigorous interviews and speeches. Murtha effortlessly swatted down the Republican libels of him and the usual devious efforts to undercut him from prime-time hawks like CNN's Wolf Blitzer.

But the subsequent fate of Sheehan's and Murtha's campaigns is highly instructive. Sheehan threatened a challenge to Senator Diane Feinstein who is running for her third term this year. Because CounterPuncher Todd Chretien has got the Green Party nomination, Sheehan thought aloud about challenging Feinstein in the Democratic primary. Why not? Feinstein has been unwavering in her support for the war, and her husband Richard Blum has made millions in war-related contracts. Sentiment against the war across the state is strong. Sheehan is well known. But then Senator Barbara Boxer intervened and publicly pleaded with Sheehan to stand down. She did. Result? Politically speaking, Sheehan has vanished.

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If any Democrat had the sort of manly credibility Chris Matthews craves, it was surely Jack Murtha. He's a former Marine drill instructor, a war vet and, in Congress, had a proven record as paid-up member of the Military Industrial Complex with his years as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. Here was no peacenik turning against the war. But the day he did, the Democratic delegation in Congress fled him, almost to the last man and woman. (As did too many on the left, who whined that somehow Murtha's withdrawal plan wasn't quite radical enough. What did they want? To have Murtha hold up the Little Red Book and swear allegiance to the memory of Mao?)

In its present form the Democratic Party has ceased to be a credible opposition. It is constitutionally incapable of confronting the Administration, on the war or anything else.

Their only strategy is to let George Bush self-destruct. They don't care how many are killed in Iraq or how many items in the Bill of Rights Bush and Cheney tear up. They are terrified of actually doing or saying something substantive, except to taunt Mexicans crossing the border in search of work or to thump the nativist drum about Arabs owning American assets.

Is this too cruel? Surely the Democrats have some fight left in them. After all, the first edition of the Patriot Act in 2002 passed with only one No vote in the Senate. Russell Feingold's. When the second edition of the Patriot Act passed in recent weeks, there were ten votes against, one from a former Republican, Jeffords of Vermont. The Democrats invented a new form of "safe opposition" here. When Russ Feingold tried to lead a filibuster against the Patriot Act, his Democratic colleagues conducted "test votes" where many of them puffed up their chests and boldly said they opposed the Patriot Act. Then they came to the real vote, chests subsided and the numbers dwindled to eight.

Feingold has now introduced into the Senate a censure motion of the President, charging him with violating the law in the NSA eavesdropping. Dana Milbanke in the *Washington Post* had an entertaining piece describing the panic of Feingold's Democratic colleagues when asked for their views on his motion.

There's no national agenda, no overall strategy for ending the war. The national leadership of the peace movement has failed.

Barrack Obama of Illinois: "I haven't read it."

Ben Nelson of Nebraska: "I just don't have enough information."

John Kerry of Massachusetts: "I really can't [comment] right now."

Hillary Clinton of New York rushed past reporters shaking her head, then trying to hide behind the 4'11" Barbara Mikulski.

Charles Schumer of New York, who would normally run over his grandmother to get to a microphone: "I'm not going to comment."

Mary Landrieu of Louisiana: "Senator Feingold has a point he wants to make. We have a point that we want to make, talking about the budget."

Chris Dodd of Connecticut: "Most of us feel at best it's premature. I don't think anyone can say with any certainty at this juncture that what happened [i.e., the NSA's eavesdropping] is illegal."

In the face of this preen of yellow feathers Feingold said, "If there's any Democrat who can't say the President has no right to make up his own laws, I don't know if that Democrat really is the right candidate for president."

Right on, Russ, but you know the answer already. You're in a race for the Democratic nomination for President in 2008 where you are the only candidate thus far prepared to say the President is a lawbreaker and that the war is illegal and should be ended immediately and the Patriot Act repealed. Why are you in this party? You come from a state which eighty years ago saw the bold stand of Robert LaFollette who broke away to form a third party. Why don't you do the same?

Look at Jim Jeffords of Vermont. He broke free, defied the Republican whip, is now an independent and has more stature in his state than Patrick Leahy. Be that "guy" that Mathews craves for. Jump! Someone has to seize the time. CP

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